



THE  
CONNOISSEUR.

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CRITIC and CENSOR-GENERAL.

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NUMBER XV.

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THURSDAY, May 9, 1754.

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— — *Tu dic, mecum quo pignore certes.* VIRG.



FRIEND of mine who belongs to the Stamp-Office acquaints me, that the revenue arising from the duty on cards and dice continues to increase every year, and that it now brings in near six times more than it did at first.

This will not appear very wonderful, when we consider that gaming is now become rather the business than amusement of our persons of quality; that their whole attention is employed in this important article, and that they are more concerned about the transactions of the two clubs at *White's* than the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament. Thus it happens that estates are now almost as frequently made over by whist and hazard as by deeds and settlements; and

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the chariots of many of our nobility may be said (like Count *Basset's* in the play) "to roll upon the four aces."

THIS love of gaming has taken such entire possession of their ideas, that it infects their common conversation. The management of a dispute was formerly attempted by reason and argument; but the new way of adjusting all difference in opinion is by the sword or a wager: so that the only genteel method of dissent is to risk a thousand pounds, or take your chance of being run through the body. The strange custom of deciding every thing by a wager is so universal, that if (in imitation of *Swift*) any body was to publish a specimen of *Polite Conversation*, instead of old sayings and trite repartees he would in all probability fill his dialogues with little more than bet after bet, or now and then a calculation of the odds.

WHITE's, the present grand scene of these transactions was formerly distinguished by gallantry and intrigue. During the publication of the *Tatler*, Sir *Richard Steel* thought proper to date all his love-news from that quarter: but it would now be as absurd to pretend to gather any such intelligence from *White's*; as to send to *Batson's* for a lawyer, or to the *Roll's* Coffee-house for a man-midwife.

THE gentlemen who now frequent this place profess a kind of universal Scepticism; and as they look upon every thing as dubious, put the issue upon a wager. There is nothing however trivial or ridiculous, which is not capable of producing a bet. Many pounds have been lost upon the colour of a coach-horse, an article in the news, or the change of the weather. The birth of a child has brought great advantages to persons not in the least related to the family it was born in; and the breaking off a match has affected many in their fortunes, besides the parties immediately concerned.

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BUT the most extraordinary part of this fashionable practice is what in the gaming dialect is called, *pitting one man against another*; that is, in plain English, wagering which of the two will live longest. In this manner people of the most opposite characters make up the subject of a bet. A player perhaps is pitted against a duke, an alderman against a bishop, or a pimp with a privy-counsellor. There is scarce one remarkable person, upon whose life there are not many thousand pounds depending, or one person of quality whose death will not leave several of these kinds of mortgages upon his estate. The various changes in the health of one, who is the subject of many bets, occasions very serious reflections in those who have ventured large sums on his life and death. Those who would be gainers by his decease, upon every slight indisposition, watch all the stages of his illness, and are as impatient for his death, as the undertaker who expects to have the care of his funeral; while the other side are very solicitous about his recovery, send every hour to know how he does, and take as much care of him, as a clergyman's wife does of her husband who has no other fortune than his living. I remember a man with the constitution of a porter, upon whose life very great odds were laid; but when the person he was pitted against was expected to dye every week, this man unexpectedly shot himself through the head, and the knowing ones were taken in.

THOUGH most of our follies are imported from *France*, this has had its rise and progress entirely in *England*. In the last illness of *Louis* the fourteenth Lord *Stair* laid a wager on his death; and we may guess what the *French* thought of it, from the manner in which *Voltaire* mentions it in his *Siècle de Louis xiv.* "Le Roi fut attaqué vers le milieu  
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“ mois d'Août. Le Comte de Stair Ambassadeur d'Angle-  
“ terre PARIA, *selon le genie de sa nation*, que le Roi ne  
“ passeroit pas le mois de Septembre.” “ The King, says he,  
“ was taken ill about the middle of August ; when Lord  
“ Stair, the ambassador from England BETTED, according  
“ to the genius of his nation, that the King would not live  
“ beyond September.

I AM in some pain lest this custom should get among the ladies. They are at present very deep in cards and dice ; and while my lord is gaming abroad, her ladyship has her rout at home. I am inclined to suspect that our women of fashion will also learn to divert themselves with this polite practice of laying wagers. A birthday suit, the age of a beauty, who invented a particular fashion, or who were suppos'd to be together at the last masquerade, would frequently give occasion for bets. This would also afford them a new method for the ready propagation of scandal, as the truth of several stories which are continually flying about the town would naturally be brought to the same test. Should they proceed further to stake the lives of their acquaintance against each other, they would doubtless bet with the same fearless spirit as they are known to do at brag : one husband perhaps would be pitted against another, or a woman of the town against a maid of honour. In a word, if this once becomes fashionable among the ladies, we shall soon see the time, when an allowance for *bet-money* will be stipulated in the Marriage Articles.

As the vices and follies of persons of distinction are very apt to spread, I am much afraid lest this branch of gaming should descend to the common people. Indeed it seems already to have got among them. We have frequent  
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accounts in the daily papers of tradesmen riding, walking, eating and drinking for a wager. The contested election in the city has occasioned several extraordinary bets: I know a butcher in *Leadenball* market, who laid an ox to a shin of beef on the success of Sir *John Barnard* against the field; and have been told of a Publican in *Thames* street, who ventured an hoghead of intire butt on the candidate who serves him with beer.

WE may observe that the spirit of gaming displays itself with as much variety among the lowest as the highest order of people. It is the same thing, whether the dice rattle in an orange barrow or at the Hazard table. A couple of chairmen in a night-cellar are as eager at put or all-fours, as a party at St. *James's* at a rubber of whist; and the E. O. table is but an higher sort of *Merry-go-round*, where you may get six halfpence for one, six pence for one, and six twopences for one. If the practise of pitting should be also propagated among the vulgar, it will be common for prize-fighters to stake their lives against each other, and two pickpockets may lay which of them shall first go to the gallows.

To give the reader a full idea of one wholly employed in this manner, I shall conclude my paper with the character *Montano*. *Montano* was born heir to a nobleman remarkable for deep play, from whom he very early imbibed the principles of gaming. When he was at school, he was the most expert of any of his playfellows at taw, and would often strip them of their whole week's allowance at chuck. He was afterwards at the head of every match at football or cricket; and when he was captain he made a lottery, but went away without drawing the prizes. He is still

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talked of at the school for a famous dispute he had with another of his own cast about their superiority in learning; which they decided by tossing up heads or tails who was the best scholar. Being too great a genius for our universities at home, he was sent abroad on his travels, but never got further than *Paris*; where having lost a considerable bet of four to one concerning the taking a town in *Flanders*, he was obliged to come back with a few guineas he borrowed to bring him over. Here he soon became universally known by frequenting every gaming-table and attending every horse-race in the kingdom. He first reduced betting into an art, and made *White's* the grand market for wagers. He is at length such an adept in this art, that whatever turn things take, he can never lose: this he has effected by what he has taught the world to call *bedging a bet*. There is scarce an election in the kingdom which will not end to his advantage; and he has lately sent over commissions to *Paris* to take up bets on the recall of the parliament. He was the first that struck out the above-mentioned practice of pitting, in which he is so thoroughly versed, that the death of every person of quality may be said to bring him a legacy; and he has so contrived the bets on his own life, that, live or die, the odds are in his favour.

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